

Parents' Union School,  
Ambleside.

Marshall Jackson's  
articles

Jackson

Dear Editor,

I have read with very great interest Mr Marshall Jackson's capital papers on the P.N.E.U. Method. He tells us that he has had "a busman's holiday", but he has written with so much appreciation and pleasure that I gather the holiday has been a congenial one.

I think Mr Marshall Jackson deserves our thanks for the very painstaking and understanding way in which he has attempted to cover his subject, but I am sure he would be the first to admit that in undertaking such a task it is not unlikely that some inaccuracies may have crept in. I hope therefore you will allow me to have an opportunity of calling attention to them. I have received one or two letters asking if certain statements which give a wrong impression could not be corrected, and I have therefore waited till the whole of the papers appeared lest I should seem to write too hastily.

It is perhaps best to take the papers in order, and to draw attention to the points as they occur. In the first paper, Mr Jackson says that his task was "to investigate P.N.E.U. methods and write a balanced view of the method of instruction as applied to Elementary Schools". This rather limits his treatment of the whole subject. His papers only deal with the P.N.E.U. method of instruction, and almost entirely with its results in Elementary Schools. I think the "impressions" that have been called in question are chiefly due to this fact, because Miss Mason's Method is not a method of instruction, though certainly school instruction forms part of it; it is a philosophy of life, and therefore concerns children, their parents and teachers, in many other ways besides school subjects.

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In the sketch Mr Jackman gives of Miss Mason herself, may I draw attention to the following points? -

"After service in several schools, she decided to seek further training." Miss Mason did not attempt to teach until she had been trained. There was no training in those days open to ladies except that for Elementary Schools, and that is why she went to the Home and Colonial Training College.

*near*

"From Chichester College Miss Mason went to a school in Bradford. Here she began the great work of her life, - education in the home school." After her work at Worthing and Chichester, Miss Mason decided to spend some years in writing. She was very much interested in the teaching of Geography, and for some months she walked in Hampshire and other counties, getting material for her book, The Forty Shires. When she started to write, she went to Bradford to see ~~and~~ a friend who had a very successful private secondary school there. Miss Mason took occasional classes, but the chief part of her time was spent in bringing out The Forty Shires and then the five Ambleside Geography Books. Then in 1886 she gave the lectures on home education which led to the publication of Home Education and to the formation of the Parents' Educational Union in Bradford.

"We are told by the Director of the P.U.S., in connection with the first syllabus for the Home School, that the central principles and objects are there intact." Two things are here confused. "The central principles and objects" refer to those of the Union itself, for which the draft proof was drawn up in 1888. "The first syllabus" refers to the work of the Parents' Union School, which was not issued from Ambleside until June, 1891. During the eighties, Miss Mason spent occasional holidays with another friend (who had succeeded Miss Clough of Newnham in a small co-educational school which Miss Clough had founded in Ambleside), and these visits to the Lake District gave Miss Mason the idea of starting the House of Education, in that neighbourhood. This Training College for Secondary Teachers was started with four students in 1892, but the P.U.S. (already started) has always been a correspondence school only, ~~taught~~ in the Practising School after the training college the programmes ~~are~~ *naturally* carried out by the students.

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PAPER II.

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The writer states that the "Ambleside Geography" books are out of date, and it is true that they are gradually being revised, but the real point at issue is that we have been going through rather a long phase of purely scientific geography. It was not altogether a question of the "Ambleside" books being out of date, but the contents and method were out of fashion. Teachers ~~were~~ <sup>Many</sup> now ~~found~~ that Geography approached chiefly from the statistical side is barren, and that illustrations without literary letter-press lead to very little.

admit-

As to Arithmetic, the P.U.S. programmes do not attempt to do more than cover the ground necessary for the School Certificate Examination at the age of 16 plus. It is good that Mr Marshall Jackman is inclined to think that too much time may be given to this subject in Elementary Schools, but of course Elementary School children by the time they are 11 plus or 14 have to cover more ground than the P.U.S. programmes cover for the same ages.

It is not an oversight that the P.N.E.U. conditions have not been varied for Elementary Schools. I refer later on to this point, but, as regards the timetable, all the P.N.E.U. timetables can do is to show that the full programme can be covered in a certain amount of time. P.E.B. schools have much more <sup>Public</sup> ~~time~~ than this at their disposal, not only for the margin which is necessary for their large classes, but also for their vocational work.

I do not suppose that anyone would prefer to restrict the amount of books. Everyone knows that it is better for the children to have as many books to use for themselves as possible, but the cost of complete sets of books for Elementary Schools is prohibitive. I believe that Mr Household's point with regard to the advantages of the group system is that it has tended more than anything else to make it necessary for the children to study independently. I am not sure that anything else would have convinced many teachers that this sort of study was possible for Elementary children.

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The statement that Miss Mason "is very strong in her condemnation of all other forms of school regime" is open to question, because it was not her habit to condemn other school regimes, but rather to set forth certain principles. She never ceased to express her enormous respect for teachers of all classes and for the beautiful work they did, but she believed that the P.U.U. philosophy should help to do away with many difficulties met by teachers in their schools, and to give the children under their charge an education which should enable them to live their lives as persons more fully, whatever their after-work. \*

We all know that it is still possible to find schools, both Secondary and Elementary, where the oral lesson is paramount, and where the books are limited to two or three text-books or school readers, and we are told that in 1926, -

"Even in the upper classes the oral lesson is still supreme. In most London Schools a visitor, on entering a classroom during the History period, can rely upon finding the teacher addressing rows of silent and apparently attentive children. It is probably safe to say that the majority of the children in London Elementary Schools spend at least 75 per cent of their time during the History periods as passive listeners, and in some schools it is difficult to ascertain what else they do. This may be due in a few cases to the fact that the oral lesson given least trouble to the teacher, but the predominant reason is the over-crowded syllabus. So much ground has to be covered in the term that the conscientious teacher feels that he dare not tarry by the wayside. He must instil into the children as much information as he can in the most rapid way. Oral instruction certainly has its part, and that an important one, to play, but undue reliance upon it makes it difficult to give adequate attention to other features of History teaching.... On more than one occasion the teacher of a top class had, apparently, used no other book than a small text-book written for young children."

(Board of Education General Report on the  
Teaching of History in London Elementary  
Schools, 1927.)

It is not, however, a question of discussing small details, but of understanding vital principles, the vital principles springing

\* Evidence to what Miss Mason did in this connection may be read in the Testimonies from Teachers, Parents &c. in the 2nd Memorial volume.

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from the philosophy of education which Miss Mason has bequeathed as an educational trust. The P.N.E.U. Method is perhaps suffering to-day from having become fashionable, and from being taken up by teachers who have looked upon it as a hope of stirring fresh interest in their children, teachers who have used the programmes as lists of books, or have taken up one suggestion or another out of Miss Mason's books, and have made no attempt to see the philosophy as a whole.

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P.L.S. tells us how the work of a great teacher should be regarded, -

"To be a true disciple is to think of the same things as our prophet, and to think of different things in the same order. To be of the same mind with another is to see all things in the same perspective; it is not to agree in a few indifferent matters near at hand and not much debated; it is to follow him in his farthest flights, to see the force of his hyperboles, to stand so exactly in the centre of his vision that whatever he may express, your eyes will light at once on the original, that whatever he may see to declare, your mind will at once accept. You do not belong to the school of any philosopher, because you agree with him that theft is, on the whole, objectionable, or that the sun is overhead at noon. It is by the hard sayings that discipleship is tested. We are all agreed about the middling and indifferent parts of knowledge and morality; even the most soaring spirits too often take them tamely upon trust. But the man, the philosopher or the moralist, does not stand upon these chance adhesions; and the purpose of any system looks towards those extreme points where it steps valiantly beyond tradition and returns with some covert hint of things outside. Then only can you be certain that the words are not words of course, nor mere echoes of the past; then only are you sure that if he be indicating anything at all, it is a star and not a street-lamp; then only do you touch the heart of the mystery, since it was for these that the author wrote his book."

A street lamp is a local commodity set on the right spot and arranged as to details for local needs. A star gives light to all and is not arranged for local needs.

Miss Mason's aim in organising the P.U.S. was a common curriculum for all kinds of schools, for all classes. It is an organic whole, living when its life touches life, but dead in the hands of anyone seeking a mechanical device.

The common bond,  
the common mental background between children  
of all classes is a valuable adjunct in the training  
of citizens.

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PAPER III.

The writer says that the answers to the examination questions are corrected and marked before they are sent to Ambleside. May I say that such papers are disqualified by our examiners? Teachers are perfectly at liberty to mark and report upon their own papers, but the test papers sent to Ambleside must be sent unmarked and uncorrected.

The connection suggested by Miss Mason between P.U.S. Forms and Standards in Public Elementary Schools is only suggested. In many P.E. Schools it is found better not to attempt the work of the higher Forms for at least a year after taking up P.N.E.U. work in Forms I. and II. In some of the Elementary Schools in Gloucestershire, work is already being done in the P.U.S. Forms IV and V by pupil teachers. In a few schools there are also small Forms working in Form IV.

*Public Elementary*  
The writer asks, "What effect will the limitation of books have upon the progress of the pupils?" I venture to think that under the P.N.E.U. work the children come into touch with a much larger number of books than they would under any other circumstances. The generosity of the Gloucestershire Authorities in the matter of books has been so great that I think it is hardly gracious to suggest that they have not done enough. There is another aspect, also, of the question. Many of the teachers feel themselves unequal to dealing with the books. Their own training has not enabled them to come into touch with some of the subjects taken up, and the time at their disposal for such work while they are teaching makes it impossible for them to attempt to cover all the subjects on the programme. We do not find that this difficulty exists only in the Elementary Schools.

The work of the Parents' Union School can hardly be said to be carried on "by a nondescript Committee". Miss Mason did not leave her work without having made provision for it to be carried on on the lines she had laid down. The Principal of the House of Education is one of her own students, trained by Miss Mason. The Director of the Parents' Union School was trained for her present work during the thirty years she carried out Miss Mason's directions as her secretary. The Director has *the* help of highly qualified and trained assistants

(University-Women)

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and there has always been a staff of University men to examine the children's papers.

The programmes and examination papers are still tested, (as they always have been), in various ways, (a), by the very large daily correspondence with teachers in (i) Home Schoolrooms, (ii) private Secondary Schools, (iii) Public Elementary Schools, (b), by the reports of the P.J. examiners upon each child's work, and their detailed reports to the Director, (c), by the reading from the children's answers to the examination questions (which is one of the most important tests) before the signing of the reports, (d), in the work of the students of the Training College, who learn to carry out the programmes in the Practising School of the College, (e), by the College Staff of specialists who train the students for this work, and (f), in the weekly criticism lessons given by the students before the Principal of the College, at which the whole of the College and the Staff are present, as well as the Director of the P.U.S.

PAPER IV.

Papers V

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Mr Marshall Jackman says, "The outstanding feature of the P.N.E.U. scheme is that of narration. It is almost the only new feature, strictly speaking, of the teaching method." Miss Mason herself said, "Narration is no new method. It is as old as the mind of man." I would venture to say that the P.N.E.U. scheme has no outstanding feature, and that where what are considered outstanding features have been adopted by teachers, they have been used as mechanical devices rather to the detriment of the children. Miss Mason's work is suffering at the present time from the mistaken idea that it is a method of teaching English by narration. This leads to the use of narration as a mechanical device, and children become self-conscious. When knowledge is given the first place, children forget themselves and narrate without the signs of the nervous overstrain which rightly gave Mr Marshall Jackman concern. Miss Mason always taught us that "persons mattered more than things", and wherever teachers reverse this order the children suffer.

Another point which teachers do not always understand is that methods of narration are infinitely varied, and these should be constantly varied in a class lest the work become stereotyped; but it takes a wise and understanding teacher to follow the needs not only of a class, but of the individual children in a class, and to give them what they need instead of applying mechanical devices which seem attractive. The lesson "carried out on strictly P.N.E.U. lines" was anything but a P.N.E.U. lesson. The description of it shows that the teacher had little, if any, knowledge of P.N.E.U. principles, and certainly no knowledge of applying them.

PAPER VII.

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There is one point, perhaps, in Paper VII, to which attention may be called, and that is the drudgery of corrections. Miss Mason's words were certainly, "Teachers are relieved of the exhausting drudgery of many corrections", but they have been misunderstood. She never implied that corrections for a class of 30 to 40 children would be a light task. But where children have many and varied books, they write reports which in matter, manner and spelling, reduce the "exhausting drudgery" to a minimum.

Excellent papers on this subject may be had from  
the P.N.E.U. Office 26 Victoria St. S.W.

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In conclusion, may I say that Miss Mason laid no claims for any system or method of teaching unless it was based on the understanding of the laws of mind which she put forward in her philosophy. Her desire was not to impose a home school scheme upon schools, but to create a common curriculum for all classes of the community and all kinds of schools, which should produce a basis of common thought, and should help to do away with the unhappy divisions which class education has produced. Miss Mason recognised to the full the merits of able Elementary teachers, and what they did for their schools. Though Miss Mason sought colleagues in her crusade for "a liberal education for all" amongst teachers and educational authorities of all kinds, she was entirely free from any dogmatic wish to impose either her own thought or her methods upon anyone who did not sympathise with her in the work she was trying to do. She always paid high tribute to the teachers, both Secondary and Elementary, who had so grasped her philosophy that they were able to overcome the mechanical difficulties of fitting the P.U.E. programmes to the special conditions necessary in schools. It will greatly hinder the progress of Miss Mason's work if the method is restricted to the teaching of English only.

/quoted by Mr. Jackman

I venture to think that the "Suggestions" (published by the Board of Education) refer chiefly to books of information. Miss Mason always taught us that the principles of science, if presented in literary language, could be grasped by any child of suitable age, and that books which dealt with principles and the romance of science generally were likely to give that initial idea without which it is impossible to set up the habit of observation. We quite agree with Mr. Jackman that it might be better to place the teacher first and the text-book later, if that were the only alternative, but the teacher would himself realise that he could only be a substitute, and a rather poor one at that, for the great man who has written a great book.

The selection of books and the use of them is, as Mr. Marshall Jackman rightly says, an act of faith. We are told that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen", and during the 40 years of the P.M.E.U. movement it was only Miss Mason's faith in things hoped for, and the constant evidence that came from others who had faith in the same things, that gave, and continue to give, us all courage to continue work in which the evidence is chiefly in things not seen.

faithfully yours  
F. Kitching